

Tech savvy 351 young people tune-in to podcasts

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Hey all you purveyors of traditional media, look out. Media consumers such as 20-year-old Kara O'Connell of Novi are growing up and plugging in. O'Connell, a senior journalism student at Oakland University does not cull her weekly information stream from nightly news programs or even women's magazines. O'Connell gets her fix with subscriptions to no less than four podcasts each week.

A podcast is an audio feed, sometimes including a video, downloaded from a podcast library, such as iTunes, or individual Web sites such as www.henryford.com that can be listened to or viewed on a computer or MP3 player. Creators often update their podcasts regularly, much like a newspaper columnist or weekly radio show host.

O'Connell listens to her personally selected feeds on the way to work or school, between classes and in the gym.

For O'Connell and others like her, personal convenience is the podcast's most appealing feature.

It's no surprise then that tech-savvy young people are the most likely to be tuned in, said marketing consultant Eric Weaver, principal partner for Sound Principles LLC.

"According to a recent Bridge Ratings Study, 85 percent of listeners from the ages of 12 to 24 would choose their MP3 player over traditional radio," Weaver said.

From a content-generation standpoint, podcast producers — which include small and large companies, groups, two or more friends and even individuals — are working hard to make sure their message is getting out there.

In April 2006, FeedBurner announced that the number of podcasts managed by its service exceeded the total number of radio stations in the entire world.

In fact, between December 2004 and February 2007, the number of feeds available through FeedBurner grew from 202 to 91,438.

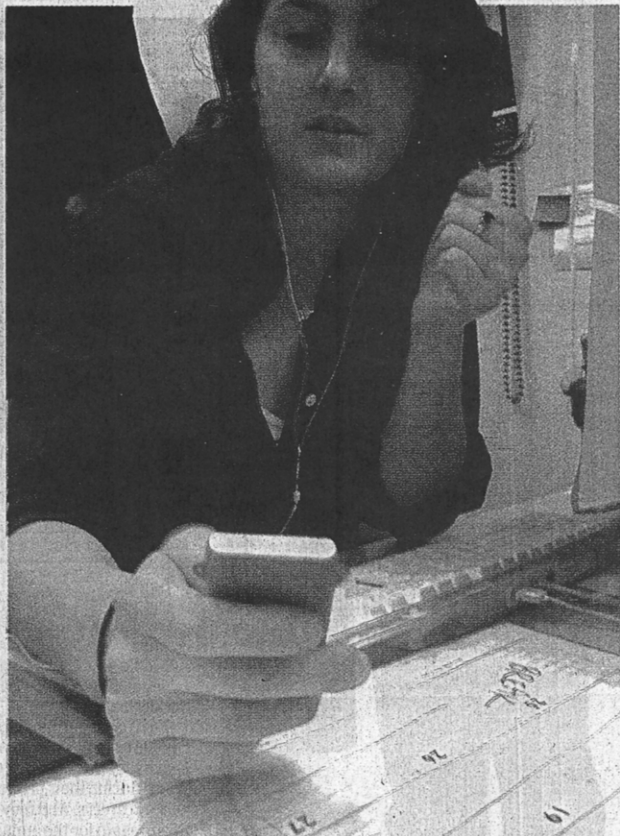
Just how many people are listening? The numbers are sketchy. According to a report produced by Forrester Research in April 2006, only 1 percent of online consumers use podcasts regularly.

But the numbers are growing. With that in mind, some companies are entering the podcast arena with an eye toward the future.

Henry Ford Health Systems recently released a series of podcasts on heart health, healthy eating and seasonal topics such as cold weather exercise options, along with its Minds of Medicine TV series, at www.henryford.com and iTunes.

"Do I think an 18-year-old is going to download a HeartSmart podcast" said Pam Landis, director of Web services for the health system. "No, I don't. But when he's 35 and can't lose that last 15 pounds, we're going to have the technology he's used to."

While young people may be leading the charge, the podcast falls in step with America's love affair with fast food.



Macomb Daily staff photo by David Dalton

Kara O'Connell, 20, of Novi, a senior journalism student at Oakland University, tunes in to her favorite podcasts to catch up on the weekly news at work at the student newspaper, the Oakland Post.

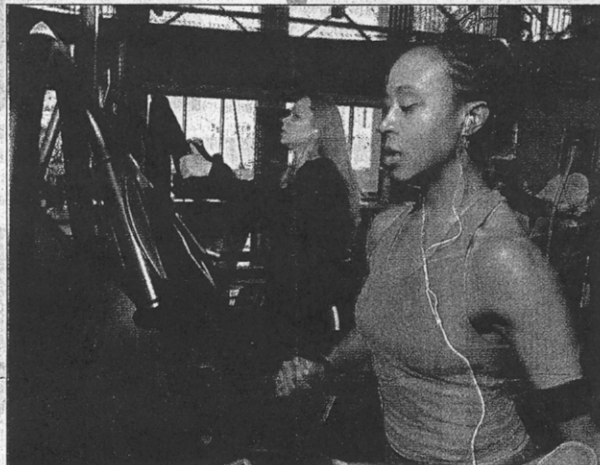


Photo by Ray Manning, Henry Ford Hospital

Tammy Ramey of Detroit (back left) and Jessica Dunn of Southfield listen to their favorite podcasts while exercising at the fitness center at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

"Americans are constantly in search of downsizing and inter-personalizing their environment," said Mike Bernacchi, a marketing professor at the University of Detroit Mercy. "The podcast is mobile and it gives the consumer their ultimate choice: When they want it, where they want, how they want it."

Low production costs enable just about anyone to create podcasts on just about any subject, often appealing to a small but rabid fan-base, said Ted Demopoulos, an Internet strategy and information security consultant.

"Compared to radio and TV, podcasting is cheap," Demopoulos said. "So unlike traditional media, it's easy to target niche audiences."

Consider GrapeRadio for the wine geek; EnduranceRadio for the endurance athlete; and RightLook Radio for the small but specific auto reconditioning industry.

Got a thing for right-wing or left-wing radio? There's a podcast for you.

"That's the joy and danger of multi-